

broader Middle East. Democracies don't war with their neighbors. Democracies don't become safe haven for terrorists who want to destroy innocent life. We have hard work ahead of us, but we're on the—we're making good progress toward making sure this world of ours is more peaceful for generations to come.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:31 a.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; and Gov. Bob Riley of Alabama.

Remarks in a Discussion on Medicare in El Mirage, Arizona August 29, 2005

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. As you can see, it's not going to be just me doing the talking today. We've got some of your fellow citizens here to discuss how we can make sure our senior citizens understand there's a fantastic opportunity available for them in the improved Medicare piece of legislation I signed.

Before we start talking about Medicare, I do want to thank the good folks here at this center, those who live here, those who are helping the folks who live here, for inviting us. It's not easy to have the Presidential entourage come. *[Laughter]* I understand that. But at least my entourage was spiced up by the First Lady's traveling with me today. I appreciate you coming.

Laura and I are proud to be here. We're proud to be with Senator Jon Kyl, who is a fantastic United States Senator. I appreciate you, Senator. We appreciate working with you, and we appreciate getting to know you. He brings Arizona values to Washington, DC. He's a good, down-to-earth fellow who cares a lot about the people here.

And speaking about somebody who does a fine job representing this district, we're honored to be here with Trent Franks—Congressman, thank you—and his wife, Josie. One thing about Trent Franks, you don't have to worry about him telling the truth. He's a good, decent, honorable cit-

izen, and I'm proud to call him friend. I want to thank you for coming, Congressman.

I want to thank the secretary of state, Jan Brewer. Madam Secretary, I appreciate you being here. And the state treasurer, David Petersen—David, thanks for coming. There he is. I don't know if it helps or hurts, but he's from Temple, Texas. *[Laughter]* If it hurts, just forget it. *[Laughter]* That's right around the corner from Crawford.

I'm really honored that the senate president is with us, Ken Bennett. I'm honored you're here. And the speaker is with us. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate you coming. Good to see you again, Ken. Speaker, appreciate you being here.

I want to thank the mayor, Fred Waterman. Mr. Mayor, thanks for coming. There he is. Phil Gordon—Mayor, are you here? Thanks, Mayor, good to see you, sir. Proud you're here. Honored you took time to come. And I want to thank Mayor Elaine Scruggs of Glendale, Arizona. Appreciate your service.

When Laura and I landed, we visited with Ruben and Rita Carroll. They work for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, the RSVP program. The reason I bring them up is that the great strength of this country lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. We got millions of people across our country who volunteer to make

somebody else's life better. And it doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are, there's plenty of opportunity in America to volunteer. And here are two citizens who are setting the way and setting a great example. Thanks for coming—appreciate you setting such a good example for others. Raise your hands so they can see you. There you go.

I know my fellow citizens here in Arizona and across the country are saying our prayers for those affected by the—Hurricane Katrina. Our gulf coast is getting hit and hit hard. I want the folks there on the gulf coast to know that the Federal Government is prepared to help you when the storm passes. I want to thank the Governors of the affected regions for mobilizing assets prior to the arrival of the storm to help citizens avoid this devastating storm.

I urge the citizens there in the region to continue to listen to the local authorities. Don't abandon your shelters until you're given clearance by the local authorities. Take precautions, because this is a dangerous storm. When the storm passes, the Federal Government has got assets and resources that we'll be deploying to help you. In the meantime, America will pray—pray for the health and safety of all our citizens.

I also want to talk about immigration here in this State. I understand the issue well. I was the Governor of a border State. I was the Governor of the State of Texas. I know what it means to have a long border with Mexico. And I understand the solemn obligation of the State government and the Federal Government to enforce our border. I did so when I was Governor, and I'll work with your Governor and Governors along the border to do so as the President of the United States. We have an obligation to enforce the borders.

I understand it's putting a strain on your resources. We know that. I don't know if you know this or not, but hundreds of thousands of people have been detained trying to illegally cross into Arizona. In other words, what I'm telling you is, there's

a lot of people working hard to get the job done, but there is more we can do.

I spoke to Mike Chertoff today; he's the head of the Department of Homeland Security. I knew people would want me to discuss this issue, so we got us an airplane on—a telephone on Air Force One, so I called him. I said, "Are you working with the Governor?" He said, "You bet we are." That's the most effective way to do things, is to work with the State and local authorities. There are more resources that will be available. We'll have more folks on the border. There will be more detention space to make sure that those who are stopped trying to illegally enter our country are able to be detained.

It's important for the people of this State to understand, your voices are being heard in Washington, DC. And this Senator and this Congressman are working closely with the administration to make sure we got the resources necessary to do our responsibility, which is enforce this border. And we'll do so—and we'll do so.

I know you're concerned about gasoline prices, and so am I. We finally got us an energy bill, and I want to thank the Members here for helping. You just got to understand that the situation we got ourselves into—dependency on foreign sources of oil—took awhile to get there, and it's going to take awhile to become less dependent. But this energy bill means we've now got a strategy which will encourage diversification away from foreign sources of oil.

And we need to do a lot of things. We need to encourage the development of nuclear power. We need to continue to develop clean coal technology so we can use that abundant resource. We need to have more terminals so we can bring liquified natural gas from around the world into the United States of America.

We will continue to use the crops in the ground to help fuel our automobiles: ethanol and biodiesel. It's going to take awhile to get diversified away from foreign oil, but thanks to Members of Congress,

we got the bill passed after 4 years of debate, and now this country is beginning the diversification process. There's no way—I wish I could just snap my fingers and lower the price of gasoline for you. The markets don't work that way. I'd be snapping if I could do it. [Laughter] But we've got a strategy and a plan to help you.

I also want to talk about some hopeful events overseas. First of all, I hope you've watched what has happened in the Holy Land. Prime Minister Sharon made a courageous decision to remove settlements out of Gaza. He said to the world, "I'm going to give the Palestinians a chance to develop a democracy." And the first step toward that democracy is to give—is to remove the settlements out of Gaza. It took political courage to make that decision, and now it's going to take political courage by the Palestinians and Prime Minister Abbas to step up, reject violence, reject terrorism, and build a democracy. And the United States of America stands ready to help.

And there's hopeful developments in Iraq. I know you see violence on your TV screens, and it breaks my heart to see the death of innocent life there. But that's the only thing the terrorists have got going for them. They've got the capacity to shake our conscience because, unlike their ideology, we value every human life. Every person is precious.

I am very optimistic about Iraq because, first of all, I believe deep in everybody's soul is the desire to be free. Freedom is not our country's gift to the world; freedom is an Almighty God's gift to each person in this world.

My hopes for free societies, of course, were bolstered when 8½ million Iraqis went to the polls last January. I know it seems like a long way away, but it wasn't all that long ago when you think about it. They voted. And recently, instead of using guns to decide the fate of the future, Iraqis from all aspects of their society came together and wrote a constitution. This constitution is one that honors women's rights

and freedom of religion. Not everybody agreed with it, but now the Iraqi people get to decide. They get to debate. They get to make the decision this fall as to whether or not that constitution will be the constitution that governs their society. And that frightens the terrorists. It scares—they cannot stand the thought of a free society emerging in the broader Middle East. The free society is the exact opposite of their vision of the world. If you want to think about the vision of these terrorists and killers, just think about what life was like for young girls, for example, under the Taliban in Afghanistan. There is no dissent. There's no right. There is no freedom.

We are laying the foundation for peace. It's hard work. But I want to assure you that for your—sake of your grandchildren and your grandchildren's children, that this policy is laying that foundation for peace, because we understand free societies are peaceful societies. We will defeat the terrorists in the short run by staying on the offense. We will defeat them in the long run by spreading freedom around the world.

Not only did I sign an energy bill, I signed a highway bill. That's going to be good for you if you've got a car. [Laughter] I also will continue to work on Social Security. I just want to make sure the seniors here understand one thing: Nothing is going to change for you. I hope you don't listen to all the politics coming out of Washington, DC, but you will get your check. You need to worry about whether or not your grandchildren will get their checks.

This system cannot sustain itself the way it is now set up. We got young kids working to pay payroll taxes into the system that's going to be broke in 2040. And that's not fair, and it's not right. My job is to confront problems, not pass them on to future Presidents. And I'm going to continue to confront that Social Security problem.

And we confronted a problem in Medicare. I remember the debate in Washington. They said, "Well, you know, this is an entitlement." Well, no, the entitlement has already been granted. This Federal Government of ours decided to provide health care for our seniors. And therefore, my attitude was, if we're going to provide health care for our seniors, let's provide the best health care available for our seniors.

And one of the things that the current system, prior to our reform, didn't do, it didn't provide prescription drugs. Now, think about that kind of system that was so antiquated and outdated that we would pay money for an ulcer but not money for the prescription drug that would prevent the ulcer from occurring in the first place. That didn't make any sense. We'd provide money for the heart surgery but not one dime of prescription drug coverage for medicines that would prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. I always felt that wasn't a very smart use of taxpayers' money. We'd pay the \$28,000 for the ulcer but not the \$500 for the medicine.

Secondly, we didn't do any preventative screenings in Medicare. A simple proposition says that if we're going to help have somebody have a healthy life, we ought to have a screening to determine what's wrong so we can solve the problem early, before it's too late.

Thirdly, we felt like seniors ought to have choice. The Government ought to trust people. The Government, as you know, in Medicare, made most of the decisions. This new bill I signed says, "If you're a senior and you like the way things are today, you're in good shape; don't change." But by the way, there's a lot of different options for you. And we're here to talk about what that means to our seniors.

And finally, a part of the Medicare bill that's very important for younger workers and small business is what's called health savings accounts. It's a really interesting op-

tion that, if you're running a small business, I urge you to look at to make sure that you've got quality health care available for your employees.

This is a good bill. It started—the bill started kicking in last year when—when we had what's called a "Welcome to Medicare" physical. If you're—if you've just recently signed up for Medicare, you know what I'm talking about. There is a free physical available for everybody who's signing up for Medicare. That's part of the preventative screening. And by the way, prior to that, we had drug discount cards for pharmacies. We saved a lot of seniors a lot of money. About 6 million seniors took advantage of the card.

What we're talking about today is new programs and plans with prescription drugs becoming available for our seniors. This is as much an education exercise as anything else, because I fully understand and our Government fully understands, many seniors don't want to change. They're not interested in change. And therefore, what I'm telling you is, is that, at least listen to what's available. You don't have to change if you don't want to, but at least be open-minded enough to listen. And our panelists today are going to represent different constituencies that will help seniors understand what's available.

By the way, starting October 1st, we have a timetable; we got a calendar. And I've got my man, McClellan, with us. He's a doctor and a Ph.D. See, every Government has got to have a Ph.D., but you notice who—the Ph.D. is not the President. [Laughter] That's the way—kind of way it works. But he's going to help—his job is to help make sure seniors understand what's available. Starting October 1st, 2005, Medicare beneficiaries start receiving information about available drug plans. So this is a pre-selling phase. We're traveling the country. I'm doing events like these; Mark is doing a lot of events like these—the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

We're laying the groundwork. We want people to be prepared for what is available.

Secondly, on November 15th, enrollment starts. In other words, you can start signing up. If you're unhappy with the current Medicare plan, here's an opportunity to sign up for a new plan.

Thirdly, January 1st, 2006, prescription drug coverage begins for seniors on Medicare. Think about that. For years, there has been no prescription drug coverage. Starting January 1st of 2006, prescription drug coverage is available, and you have up to May 15th to sign up. So we're—there's going to be ample time for people to take a look to determine whether or not you want to change from your current plan.

There's 780,000 folks on Medicare here in Arizona, and one of the reasons I have come is, hopefully, to get a message out to as many of the 780,000 that I can. And by the way, we're leaving behind a lot of folks who are going to help get out the message here in Arizona as well. If you got any questions, there's an easy way to figure out what I'm talking about here. It's called 1-800-MEDICARE. Pick up the phone; there will be somebody there to answer your question. Isn't that right, Mark? Yes. [*Laughter*] We don't want one of these "check's in the mail" deal, you know—or medicare.gov.

The reason I'm telling you this—and I'm going to say it again before I'm through talking—is that it's really important, for example, for sons and daughters to look into what's available for their mothers and dads, and one way to do it is to get on 1-800-MEDICARE or medicare.gov.

Seniors with no drug coverage and average drug dispenses will see their drug costs cut in half—by one-half. Think about that. This plan will cut your drug bill by half. You need to look at it. You need to look at what's available. And for the first time ever, Medicare has got catastrophic coverage for our seniors. In other words, it says that after you've spent \$3,600 a year,

the Government will pick up 95 percent of your prescription drug costs. And that's important. That's called peace of mind. It's peace of mind for you. It's peace of mind for your family. One of the interesting parts of this Medicare bill is the catastrophic coverage, and that's important, I thought, for quality of life—and so did Members of the Senate and Members of the House.

Competition works, by the way. You've got one provider, the Federal Government; it doesn't give consumers a lot of choice. But when you provide consumers choice, it's amazing what can happen. People start bidding for your service, so to speak. They want to attract your business. And it's going to work in Medicare too. Did you realize that there's at least one prescription drug plan with premiums below \$20 a month in every State now? It's a pretty good deal. And here in Arizona, you've got two plans that cost \$20 a month or less and six plans at 20 to 25 dollars a month. In other words, you've got people bidding for your services. That's the whole purpose of the bill, is to say the consumer matters, and our seniors matter a lot. And so you've got a lot of choices.

You can pick any Medicare drug plan that meets your needs, and there will be—as I mentioned, here in Arizona, there's quite a few to choose from. You can keep Medicare as it is. Do you realize about 200,000 citizens here in Arizona use Medicare Advantage Plans, and they're really important plans. It's all part of making sure there is a menu of choice available for our seniors.

I want to talk about low-income seniors right quick. And by the way, if you're getting your coverage from your labor union or your business, this bill will help make sure that your labor union and your business continues to provide health care for you.

I want to talk about low-income seniors, and this is very important for people to understand; that's why it's important for people to go out and explain to—what's

available. One-third of our seniors, the lower-income seniors, will be eligible for drug benefits that include little or no premium. In other words, the premium I was talking about was for people who are more likely able to afford a premium. If you're a poor senior here in Arizona, you will have—end up with little or no premium, low deductibles, and no gaps in coverage. It's a good deal, is what I'm telling you. Let me put it bottom line: You need to look at this plan. On average, Medicare will pay over 95 percent of your costs for prescription drugs.

Now, here's what you have to do—now, this may frighten some seniors—you got to fill out a form. It would frighten me. The good news is, it's a simple application, and it's four pages long. If you believe that—well, it could be 40—big print. If you believe that you're eligible, you need to fill out the form. If you're a mother—I mean, if you're a son or a daughter, you need to get your mom or your dad to fill out the form, I'm telling you.

And that's why we're traveling the country. This is a good deal for our seniors. We have changed Medicare. We have done our duty in Washington, DC. We've upgraded an important program and made it better. And part of the challenge—it's one thing to pass the law; that was challenging enough. But part of the challenge now is to make sure the Federal Government, in concert with State and local governments as well as faith-based groups, grassroots groups, community-based groups, lobbying groups—whatever, all kinds of groups—gets the word out.

I want to thank you all for listening, and expect you as good citizens to help get the word out.

Now, the man in charge, I mentioned, is McClellan, Dr. Mark McClellan. Told you he had a Ph.D., didn't I? He also has an M.D. He has got a big responsibility. He is the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Is that right?

Mark B. McClellan. That's exactly right.

The President. He's a Texan, which means he can get the job done and will get the job done.

Explain how you're going to get the job done.

Dr. McClellan. Well, I'm getting a lot of help, and besides that, we've got a chance now, with the new law that was just enacted, to turn Medicare into a program, from one that just pays the bill when people get sick to one that really helps keep them healthy, with drug coverage, with the preventive benefits that you mentioned, Mr. President.

The thing is, speaking now from that medical background that you mentioned, you can do a lot more to keep a patient healthy if they're your partners in the effort, if they understand what they can do, if they take steps in their own life to get better care, to take care of themselves to live a longer and better life. And that's really what the new Medicare program is all about.

When I say we're getting a lot of help, I mean we're turning Medicare into a program that's really about partnership: partnerships with our beneficiaries to make sure their benefits stay up to date; partnerships with health professionals and advocates and experts around the country to make sure that people can get the assistance they need to keep their coverage up to date; partnerships to make people healthier and save money in the process.

The President. To follow up on this low-income deal for seniors, make sure that—I need a second voice up here—people are saying, “Of course, he's telling us that,” you know. I'm telling you, it's a good deal.

Dr. McClellan. It is.

The President. The doc's about to tell you.

Dr. McClellan. It is. I've had a chance to talk to a lot of people around the country. I think some of the people up here on the stage with us have had a chance to as well. This coverage for people with

limited income will pay for, in most cases, all of the cost of the premium. So you have a zero premium, no deductible, no gaps in your coverage, and you'll only pay a few dollars for each prescription, at most 3 or 5 dollars and, in a lot of cases, less than that.

And people who may not think of themselves as low-income are actually eligible for this extra help. Basically, if you're struggling with paying for your drugs today because you're living on a fixed income, you've got to worry about paying for the drugs, paying for your rent, paying for your food; you should look into this program. People with incomes—in couples—up to, close to \$20,000 are eligible.

And so about one in three seniors, Mr. President, as you said, one in three people with disabilities are eligible for this extra help.

The President. And what happens if somebody is interested and calls the 1-800-MEDICARE line?

Dr. McClellan. Well, we can give them help in filling out that form. We're working closely with the Social Security Administration as well. They sent out letters to everyone who they think may be eligible, based on their Social Security earnings. We're starting to get those applications back in. And as you said, "When in doubt, fill out the application." If you can't fill out all the questions—and it does run 4 pages, but it is big type, and it's only 16 questions altogether—most people only have to answer 12. If there's one you get to that you can't answer, that's okay. Go ahead and send in the part that you can complete, and Social Security will call you back and help you through the other questions.

The President. Great, thanks. Mark's doing a good job. Believe it or not, the Government is actually functioning in an efficient manner on this issue, and I appreciate it. It really is. He's the right man for this job.

Nancy Bryan. What do you do, Nancy?

Nancy Bryan. How are you doing today?

The President. Good, pretty good. [Laughter] If you like the heat, I'm doing great. [Laughter] It's not exactly cool in Crawford, either. [Laughter]

Ms. Bryan. This is a dry heat.

The President. Yes, that's right. [Laughter] So what do you do?

Ms. Bryan. I'm a pharmacist here in the valley, and I actually work for Wal-Mart and Sam's Club.

The President. Good.

Ms. Bryan. What I do is I travel all over the valley filling in when people need vacation time or if they have a day off. And it has been great because it gives me a chance to meet seniors from all over the valley.

The President. Right.

Ms. Bryan. In fact, I've been spending a little time up here in Surprise, lately.

The President. That's good. And are you aware of the Medicare—have you been following what we've been talking about?

Ms. Bryan. I definitely have. Wal-Mart actually has put together a program for all of their pharmacies, and they've actually been helping to train us so that we know what to do when the patients do come in to us. We have information that we can hand out to them, that we can get them to the people that can really help them the most.

The President. Part of making sure the seniors know what's available is to call on a lot of folks. The pharmacists around the country have been really doing a great service for our seniors. In other words, if—point-of-sale marketing works. And so you have a senior coming to a counter; you're available, as are your fellow men and women who work in the pharmacies, to explain: "Here's what's available. Take a look at the Medicare plan." Isn't that what you're doing?

Ms. Bryan. Exactly.

The President. Yes. It's a good deal. [Laughter] And there's a lot of folks making sure people understand. We fully understand that some people are afraid to

change; we know that. And you don't have to. But I do want to thank the pharmacists, and I want to thank Nancy. I want to thank Wal-Mart. That's called corporate responsibility, is to help people understand what's available.

And so, what are you finding? Are you finding people are nervous about it, interested about it?

Ms. Bryan. I think they're just wanting to know more information. They're a little bit confused. They're a little bit nervous.

The President. Right.

Ms. Bryan. And I think that they're just trying to figure out if it really works for them. Is this the program that's going to really help them?

The President. And there have been seminars at Wal-Mart to make sure the pharmacists—

Ms. Bryan. Well, we actually have a continuing education system for all the pharmacists.

The President. Really? That's great. That's important, and so there will be pharmacists all around Arizona who will have the proper information to explain to Arizona seniors the sign-up dates, what's available, when you can enroll, when you can start getting your prescription drugs. And that's important for people to know.

One of the things—one of the reasons I'm traveling, one of the reasons Mark is traveling, is to thank people for doing their civic duty. So I'm going to start, thanking you.

Ms. Bryan. Well, thank you.

The President. I appreciate you. And another person I'm going to thank—good job—

Ms. Bryan. Thank you.

The President. —Lieutenant Colonel Don Mowery. Is that right?

Lt. Col. Don R. Mowery. Mr. President.

The President. Yes, thanks for coming.

Lt. Col. Mowery. Thank you.

The President. Of the Salvation Army.

Lt. Col. Mowery. Thank you.

The President. Mowery. The reason I asked Don to come is that throughout this great State and throughout our country is this wonderful fabric of faith-based organizations, all of which exist to serve their fellow—fellow mankind. And the Salvation Army does a great job of doing that by the way.

Lt. Col. Mowery. Thank you. Thank you very much.

The President. Have you ever heard of the Medicare reform plan?

Lt. Col. Mowery. I have, sir.

The President. Other than this meeting?

Lt. Col. Mowery. I have.

The President. Good. How did you learn about it?

[At this point, Lt. Col. Don R. Mowery, commander, Southwest Division, Salvation Army, made brief remarks.]

The President. Well, this is an important piece—this is good. First of all, one of the reasons, again, I want to repeat: You've got a lot of churches and temples and faith-based organizations and community groups to help. If you go to a church, do your duty and find out what we're talking about and help the seniors at your church at least understand what's available. That's what the Army is doing. They've got all kinds of programs at the Salvation Army, and they've taken it upon themselves to say, as a part of their outreach to the senior community here in Arizona, "I'm going to learn what this is all about." It is—I appreciate you doing this.

Lt. Col. Mowery. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. And thanks for setting such a good example.

Lt. Col. Mowery. Thank you.

The President. Now we've got Noreen Goodell. Noreen, thank you for being here.

Noreen Goodell. Well, thank you, Mr. President.

The President. What do you do?

Ms. Goodell. I'm becoming very nervous on stage. [Laughter]

The President. You don't look it, so don't let them know. [Laughter]

Ms. Goodell. I thought that was, "Don't let them see you sweat."

The President. That's it. [Laughter]

Ms. Goodell. I have the privilege and honor of being a registered nurse, and I work for Sun Health Hospice.

The President. Good. Thank you.

Ms. Goodell. Thank you. And I am also the caregiver for my parents, my mother and father, and also my mother-in-law.

The President. Yes. This is an important—everybody is important up here. Noreen represents a constituency group that I'm going to keep calling upon—daughters and sons and daughter-in-laws and sons. We have an obligation, it seems like to me, and you're fulfilling that obligation.

Ms. Goodell. I am, and I'm blessed for it.

The President. There you go. So you heard about the Medicare deal.

Ms. Goodell. I have.

The President. And? How did you hear about it?

Ms. Goodell. Well, being a hospice nurse I deal with a lot of the geriatric population in Sun City and Sun City West, and sometimes they have questions about Medicare benefits, which we try our best to answer. So I thought that it was important that I would try to look into what benefits are available for them and also my parents as well, to make sure that I can provide the best care possible and be their advocate.

The President. Right. And is the schedule clear, the October 15th—the applications go out, the sign-up dates, the—when it begins, is that—

Ms. Goodell. If it wasn't, it will be now. [Laughter]

The President. In other words—[laughter]—did you try 1-800-MEDICARE? [Laughter]

[*Ms. Goodell made further remarks.*]

The President. Listen, Noreen is here; she's a nurse. But if you've got a—but she's also a devoted child. Baby boomers—are you one?

Ms. Goodell. Sandwich generation.

The President. Sandwich generation, all right. I'm a baby boomer. [Laughter] All of us have a duty to find out what's available for our parents. We have an obligation as somebody who received the benefit of the love from a parent to do something to make sure our parents have got all options available to them. If you're worried about change, you do not have to change when it comes to Medicare. But if you're someone, for example, who's having to struggle between food and medicine, those days are over with. This Medicare bill relieves you of that burden and that anxiety.

And sons and daughters have got to understand that. And you need to find out what I'm talking about, for the sake of your parents. If your mother or father says, "I don't want to change," you don't have to change. But as a son or a daughter or as a faith-based initiative or as a nurse or as a pharmacist, you have a duty, as far as I'm concerned, to investigate what's available and to lay that out for people to see. And that's what we're here talking about.

And somebody who's going to benefit from this is Margaret Cantrell. That's you. Speak into that microphone, will you?

Margaret Cantrell. True, very true.

The President. She told me she has the same hairdo as my mother. [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. The same color. It's the same color.

The President. Yes, 3 more years as President and I'll have the same color you got.

Ms. Cantrell. Well, I'll be 82 years old.

The President. When?

Ms. Cantrell. This coming Monday.

The President. Oh, yeah, well, a little birthday celebration for you. You're looking pretty darn good.

Ms. Cantrell. Well, thank you.

The President. How you feeling?

Ms. Cantrell. Fair.

The President. Fair. [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. And I'm formerly from Salem, Illinois, which is Lisa James's hometown too.

The President. Lisa James. Very good, yes. Nobody knows who she is except for me and Laura. All right, there's a couple others. [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. And I was a nanny for the James gang for quite awhile.

The President. No wonder you got gray hair. [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. And I do understand about the new program. I received something from Social Security about 2 weeks ago. I immediately filled it out and sent it back in.

The President. Good move. How about that. By the way, before we get to Medicare, this good lady lives on her Social Security check.

Ms. Cantrell. I certainly do.

The President. And she told me, she said she doesn't want anybody taking it away from her.

Ms. Cantrell. That's true.

The President. Isn't that right? It's not going to happen.

Ms. Cantrell. Oh, good.

The President. That's what you've got to know. The Social Security debate is one that causes people concern because they hear, "They're debating Social Security. They may change it, and I'm not going to get my check." If you're born prior to 1950, you have nothing to worry about.

Ms. Cantrell. I was. [Laughter]

The President. Who's writing your lines for you? [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. I have my daughter—I have just one daughter, Vicki Kaylor, and my son-in-law, Gene Kaylor, and two grandsons, Steve and David. And Vicki and David are with me today.

The President. Fantastic. And so how did you learn about the Medicare plan?

Ms. Cantrell. Well, I received it from Social Security.

The President. Oh, that's right. You already said that.

Ms. Cantrell. I did. [Laughter] And I'm on——

The President. Laura said, "I always said, pay attention." [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. I'm on a first-name basis with my pharmacist, and he's very nice. And he sent me this little brochure so I'd know more about it.

The President. Good. Have you started studying the different plans available yet?

Ms. Cantrell. No, I haven't gotten it yet.

The President. Okay, well, that will be coming your way. And there will be a different—variety of options, and I'm confident that Vicki will help you—you don't need help.

Ms. Cantrell. I filled it. She didn't even see it. I filled it out and sent it back in. [Laughter]

The President. Good. Not everybody is just going to fill it out that way. That's what people have got to understand, that people are going to need a little help.

Ms. Cantrell. But it was easy to do.

The President. There you go.

Ms. Cantrell. Really.

The President. She wasn't even prompted. That's awesome.

Ms. Cantrell. Nothing to it.

The President. Did you get the four-page form?

Ms. Cantrell. I did.

The President. Four pages.

Ms. Cantrell. Four pages.

The President. Sixteen questions.

Ms. Cantrell. I didn't count the questions, but——

The President. Big print.

Ms. Cantrell. Right.

The President. Good. That's good. [Laughter] Congratulations, you finally got a form to her. [Laughter] If in doubt, fill it out. [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. Right.

The President. Isn't that it?

Ms. Cantrell. That's it.

The President. See, it's really important for those of us in public service to continue to do our duty to folks like Margaret; one, to make sure the Social Security system is available, and it will be. It's just—just your great grandkids need to worry about it. I'm not kidding you.

Ms. Cantrell. I don't have any.

The President. Well—[laughter]—you might.

Ms. Cantrell. I might.

The President. Well, somebody else's great grandkids need to worry about it.

Ms. Cantrell. Right.

The President. Shhh. [Laughter] You're younger; you better worry about Social Security. If you're an older citizen, you don't have to worry about getting good health care through Medicare anymore. That's what we're here to talk about.

Margaret has shown—says to me that, “Pay attention.” That's what she did. They got the form. Do people usually just throw away the paperwork that comes with Social Security? Now, I know you don't—not the check, but I'm talking about the paperwork. [Laughter]

Ms. Cantrell. No. No, I don't. I read it.

The President. Okay, good. I hope you don't either, out there. I hope people take a look at that form and pay attention to it because it has got valuable information for you. It means that the quality of your life will improve if you're struggling with prescription drug coverage. It means that

this Federal Government has finally, after years, modernized Medicare. And if you want to, you can be in charge. You're in charge of the decisionmaking process; in other words, there's options for you. It's your choice to make. If you don't want to do anything, if you don't want to change at all, you don't have to. But there are a lot more choices available for you. And if you're a low-income senior, you got a fantastic opportunity to get prescription drug benefits.

We don't want you choosing between your utility bills and your food bills and prescription drugs. We want your quality of life to be great, as great as possible. And this Medicare bill will help there.

I want to thank our panelists for being here. Thank you for what you're doing. Thank you for your compassion. Thank you all for coming. May the good Lord continue to bless our great Nation. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. at the Pueblo El Mirage RV Resort and Country Club. In his remarks, he referred to Josephine Franks, wife of Representative Trent Franks; James P. Weiwers, speaker, Arizona State House of Representatives; Mayor Fred Waterman of El Mirage, AZ; Mayor Phil Gordon of Phoenix, AZ; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; and Lisa James, Arizona State executive director, Bush-Cheney '04 campaign.

Remarks in a Discussion on Medicare in Rancho Cucamonga, California August 29, 2005

The President. Thank you, David. Thank you very much. Thank you. Be seated, please. Thank you all for coming. Please be seated. Thank you. So David said we went to this school together; it was called a charm school. [Laughter] I never won

my seat for Congress. He did. Obviously, it took on him and not on me. [Laughter] But I want to thank him for his introduction. I want to thank him for his leadership. David Dreier cares a lot about a lot of issues. One of the issues that he's been